

Banquo's Ghost

Macbeth's lines to Banquo's ghost give important clues about the ghost's appearance.

Macbeth: Never shake/Thy gory locks at me.

Macbeth: Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.

Macbeth: Avaunt and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold.

The Elizabethans were more willing than modern people to believe in supernatural phenomena. This partially accounts for the appearance of ghosts in Shakespeare's plays. They are dramatically effective because they help to set the atmosphere of the play as well as catch the audience's interest. In *Macbeth*, the appearance of Banquo's ghost is also effective because it is an extension of Macbeth's troubled mind.

The dramatic use of ghosts comes from a long tradition. Because ghost scenes can easily turn into comedy, their staging is crucial.

Ghosts in Elizabethan plays were represented in various ways. In *Macbeth*, for example, some directors had Banquo appear in bloodied rags, rising from the trap door on stage; others had him appear in a white sheet or sprinkled with flour. In some modern versions of the play, the ghost does not appear. Critics disagree whether even Shakespeare intended the ghost to be physically present on stage.

Questions

1. How does Shakespeare prepare his audience for the appearance of Banquo's ghost? Why does it not seem out of place?
2. Why is the ghost's silence dramatically effective?
3. Give evidence from the scene to show that Shakespeare intended to have Banquo's ghost physically appear on the stage.
4. How would you stage this scene? Do you think it would be more effective to have the ghost appear on the stage? What kind of costuming and make-up would you use? Why?
5. Do you think Banquo's ghost might be staged differently in the movies? Why?